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CRISIS: A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the US Naval War College, the Department of the US Navy or the Chilean Navy.

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<p>15. Abstract: The pursuit of national interest in the sphere of the relations between nations, temporized as political objectives, can find instances of cooperation as well as conflict. When the importance of these political objectives is vital and no solution can be implemented, the political instrument of war becomes a reality. In certain circumstances the political objective can be of more limited characteristics, opening the way to wars of the limited type. There are other situations, in which the political objective is further limited, but can not be obtained through negotiation. It is in these circumstances that the crisis, understood in this case as a different political instrument to war and not merely a phase of the conflict, becomes a viable tool. The employment of the military instrument of national power involves unique characteristics that often affect its operational and even tactical employment.</p> <p>Following an introduction to the topic a theoretical description and analysis of the crisis as an independent political instrument is developed. To give support to this concept, two historical and one contemporary events are analyzed. Closing the work, comments on the application of force and considerations for the operational commander are included.</p>			
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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, nations have employed and will probably continue to use war as the last resort for the attainment of their political objectives--whenever their importance justifies the cost and risk of the military endeavor. Nevertheless, accepting that armed conflict can still constitute a valid alternative, war sometimes results in a political instrument of very high risk, rationally unacceptable, because of the tremendous destruction that both contenders can inflict upon each other. This was precisely the case during the nuclear age, when the two superpowers resorted to and gave great importance to two strategic concepts: deterrence and indirect action ¹. The combination of these two concepts led to the re-emergence of an old socio-political activity: the Crisis. This phenomenon is not to be understood as something new that evolved out of the nuclear age, for if one looks to different confrontations of the past, it can be stated that all armed conflict has been preceded by a longer or shorter period of crisis. It is this argument that leads to the more commonly accepted definition and general understanding of crisis, i.e., a phase in armed conflict or a period between peace and war. In coexistence with this perspective, many scholars and different national strategies around the world have incorporated the concept of crisis as a political instrument ².

In effect, if one considers that a conflict in the relations between two states that has been generated by the confrontation of opposing interests is a continuous process that increases in intensity, whether because of the importance of the interests in play or because of the degree of divergence, crisis is the initial period of this conflict. The states will have entered this crisis phase because they were unable to reconcile their interests. Furthermore, as these interests increase in value and importance, the degree of violence employed will generally increase. The end state being the open use of force when these interests are considered vital. In this situation,

conflict arises from the fact that both parts have the will of enforcing their particular interests because they consider them unalienable and not because they have the premeditated intention of using the confrontation for the obtainment of these objectives. It is in this last case where the alternative concept of crisis acquires its sense and relevance. A crisis can be motivated by interests of the most diverse order, ranging from the political and economic, to the strategic and social, but the most essential factor for this instrument to be successful is that the interests in confrontation cannot be of great importance, and the vital ones should be out of consideration. The opponent must have the willingness to depart from its interests if submitted to pressures or demands. In this sense, it is a conflict of limited intensity in which the objectives are obtained without a generalized and intense use of force. The purpose is to obtain them by pressure and negotiation avoiding open confrontation. Nevertheless, although the use of force is intended to be of the limited mode, the possibility and risk of escalation is always present.

Today's global and integrational tendencies coupled with the role exercised by the UN and enforced by coalitions, generally led by the United States, make the prospect of the use of war a difficult alternative for any state. It is therefore possible to conceive crisis as a more recurring form of conflict into the future, where it is used as a political instrument for the obtainment of limited political objectives.

At the political level, crises are "managed" balancing the elements of opportunity and danger, or as Snyder and Diesing have stated: "coercing prudently and accommodating cheaply"³. This involves the skillful use of the different instruments of national power available to the political conductor. In relation to the use of the military instrument, those forces present in the area of crisis require that operational conduction be fully aware of the strategic crisis

management procedure. This sometimes imposes restrictions limiting the flexibility and freedom of action of the military commander.

COERCIVE DIPLOMACY, DIPLOMACY OF VIOLENCE AND CRISIS

Depending on the field from which the concept of crisis is approached, one can find well-known terms that convey approximately its intended meaning. Commencing with the diplomatic field, the term coercive diplomacy, intended as a wedding between force and diplomacy, considers it a process where adversaries bargain with each other through the mechanism of graduated increments of military force in order to achieve negotiated accords.⁴ More specifically during the nuclear era, because of the inconceivability of general war, threats in international politics took new forms. Therefore, military strategy evolved from the science of military victory to the act of coercion, intimidation and deterrence. In Schelling's words, "military strategy became the diplomacy of violence."⁵

A specific application of naval power related to the concepts previously stated is known as gunboat diplomacy. This is understood as "the use of threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage, or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or jurisdiction of their own state."⁶

A quick analysis of the above definitions shows that they extensively limit themselves to the use of the military instrument of national power disregarding, at least explicitly, the use of the other instruments available to the political conductor. Furthermore it is necessary to point out that in the use of crisis as a political tool, the employment of the military instrument should be considered as the last resort, and in this case with the minimum amount of violence necessary to achieve the limited political objective.⁷

From the US military perspective, the definition of crisis is given in Joint Pub 5-0, and it is there considered as "an incident or situation involving a threat to the United States, its territories, citizens, military forces, and possessions or vital interests that develops rapidly and creates a condition of such diplomatic, economic, political, or military importance that commitment of U.S. military forces and resources is contemplated to achieve national objectives."⁸ In light of this definition, it is further considered of importance to highlight a significant difference in the concept of crisis as understood by the U.S. Armed Forces and that supported in this paper. For the U.S. Armed Forces, crisis is an occurrence that involves vital national interests, and it is therefore more likely to be considered as a phase in a conflict than a distinct instrument of policy. For this last concept, the limitation of the political objective is a requirement.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

For a description of the factors involved in crisis management, it is necessary to start with a definition of crisis as a political instrument. In this respect, it should be understood as a conflict of limited intensity, willingly generated by a state to impose its interests above those of another state without recurring to a generalized or intense use of armed force.⁹ This conflict has the characteristic of reverting through negotiations to the situation that existed prior to its occurrence. The condition for this reversal being, that the objectives pursued by the generating state are met, and that these have been acceptable to the opponent.

According to Gamba¹⁰, the management of international crisis involves certain rules. The most important are:

1. Keep communication open between the opponents to facilitate bargaining.
2. Be ready to accept less than total victory.
3. Be ready to allow an honorable way out for the opponent.
4. Start confrontation at the lowest possible level of violence.
5. Meet violence proportionately.

6. Do not allow third parties to intrude in the crisis, but try to widen the community of the concerned relating to the crisis.
7. Know the spheres of influence of each opponent.
8. Keep objectives limited.
9. Decide how far you want to go.

In relation to these rules, some thoughts need to be taken into consideration. On the one hand, the bargaining process should convince rather than impose. In relation with the acceptance of a situation of less than total victory, this will most probably involve the definition of partial objectives, keeping in mind that the final political objective can be reached in due time. The honorable way out mentioned, allows for the reversibility of the process. Lastly, the confrontation should start at the lowest possible level of violence, increasing the intensity of the use of force proportionately without crossing the threshold that will lead to open conflict.

Having pointed out the limitations of the definitions of coercive diplomacy and diplomacy of violence for the purpose of explaining the concept of crisis as a political instrument, primarily due their centering on the use of the military instrument, a more complete political-strategic model available to the political conductor will be described.¹¹ The elements or instruments of national power can be summarized as the political, diplomatic, economic and military. It is accepted that they could be further subdivided and or renamed but for the ease of the modeling endeavor they will be limited to these four. Let us further consider that these four instruments constitute four elements of a matrix. Each one of these instruments of national power possesses different methods of application. Again for ease of modeling these methods will be limited to four, i.e., persuasion, inducement, negotiation and compulsion. These four methods will constitute the other side of the matrix, as shown on the following diagram.

		INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER			
METHOD OF APPLICATION		POLITICAL	DIPLOMATIC	MILITARY	ECONOMIC
	PERSUASION				
	INDUCEMENT				
	NEGOTIATION				
	COMPULSION				

Above all, it has to be kept in focus that the crisis as a political instrument is primarily directed towards the opposing political conductor and his immediate advisors. In this respect, it should encompass most of, if not all, the instruments of national power described in the previous matrix, and they should be applied using the different methods available. Any combination is possible, and these should be by no means static. The high degree of dynamism found in crisis management, and the danger of inadvertently crossing the threshold of critical violence, is what generally requires the political leader to keep a close control of the military instrument, and at the same time reduces the freedom of action of the military commander.

In relation to crisis management, it is generally accepted that if this is to be described as a process it involves several discrete phases. In the first phase known as the challenge, one of the contenders creates a situation in order to modify the present status quo. This challenge can take various forms, ranging from a threat to the actual employment of forces, and it is intended to convey "signals" to the opponent. The purpose of the challenge is to gain the initiative focusing on an adversary's vulnerability that will lead eventually to the achievement of the political objective. The challenge should involve uncertainty in relation to time and the degree of violence to be employed, and it should make use of the element of surprise. The second phase, known as the response, corresponds to the actions taken by the state that was challenged. Its purpose is to regain the initiative, increase the freedom of action, and insure control of the crisis so as to force

the adversary to depart from his intentions. The response is characterized by its speed and extension for it should encompass all possible adversary spheres of action. The third phase involves the continuation of the crisis situation for the challenging state reacts to the response of the challenged. This phase is known as the reaction, and it pursues the retention of the initiative independent of the response of the challenged, the offering of bargaining possibilities and the provision of an honorable exit for the adversary. During this third phase, a process of response-reaction can develop following three general courses of action: de-escalation, status quo or escalation. It is in this process of response-reaction where the aforementioned matrix model becomes of value for the political conductor since it graphically reminds him of the different instruments and methods of employment available. The last phase of the crisis management process, if it is to be correctly led, is known as the compromise. The solution arrived at might involve an advantage to one of the contenders or the keeping of the original status quo. If on the contrary, the crisis was incorrectly managed, an uncontrolled escalation might occur leading to the initiation of open hostilities.¹²

THE APPLICATION OF FORCE

Having stated that the application of force in this sort of crisis should be at the lowest possible level in order to control the slope of escalation process, certain characteristics are required from the military tool. Historical evidence has given naval power a great degree of graduability and this characteristic is based on the attributes of naval forces. Of these attributes, those that convey special significance for the topic under comment are flexibility, controllability, and projection ability.¹³ Flexibility is a threefold attribute for it encompasses the political/strategic, operational and logistical perspective. The political/strategic perspective arises from the fact that a naval force can perform a very broad spectrum of tasks, ranging from social

and humanitarian to purely military in character. It also has the ability to gravitate by its mere presence without having to violate any sovereign territory. The operational perspective results from the ability to deploy anywhere in any political moment, and lastly, the logistical perspective, because of its impressive staying power while maintaining its operational capability.

The controllability attribute is based on two assets possessed by warships, namely escalatory potential on one hand and the withdrawability on the other. Finally, the projection ability resides in its capacity to project power from the sea whether on the ground or in the air.

All of these distinguishing features, which in sum give naval power its graduability of employment, enable the political conductor to increase or decrease the political and strategic pressure in accordance with his will without having to sacrifice any significant freedom of action.

As a result of the experiences of the Persian Gulf, many voices have supported the increased use of air power, specially in military operations short of war. This ability is based on the distinctive features possessed by air power: namely, being a decisive force of limited commitment, of precision, flexibility, and of a high level of responsiveness. Furthermore, these characteristics make air power a suitable tool for coercive purposes, although certain limitations have also been identified.¹⁴ In this respect and in direct comparison with naval power, it is possible to identify distinct differences between the two instruments under comment. Having the matrix model for crisis management in perspective and centering on the different methods of application of the military instrument, it can be appreciated that that air power does not possess the degree of flexibility provided by sea power for, although it might be of high use in the coercion method, it does not have the same capacity for the other methods considered.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

Having very briefly conveyed the notion of crisis as a political instrument from a theoretical point of view, it is the intention to give further meaning to this concept with its application to some historical and contemporary situations, providing examples of crisis that were appropriately managed and others that were not. Furthermore, with the contemporary examples it is the purpose to show that this concept did not lose its representativeness with the end of the cold war for on one side limited objectives with a nuclear background still exist, and those within a conventional environment will certainly continue in the future.

This review will commence with the Cuban Missile Crisis for it was this event that brought the concept into focus. The process of this crisis involved the challenge imposed by the Russians with the premeditated installation of strategic missiles on the island of Cuba. It has been repeatedly stated that the political objective pursued by Nikita Krushchev was to increase Russian influence in the Caribbean region while increasing their global prestige and undermining that of the United States in the western hemisphere. The American response, denoting an understanding of the political characteristic of the threat, considered the following courses of action ¹⁵:

- Do nothing, for the missiles did not significantly alter the balance of terror. It was discarded because it was not adequate.
- Negotiate with Castro. This would retard the solution giving the opponent ample time to consolidate the challenge.
- Conduct a rapid "surgical" air strike against the missile facilities. Although initially supported by most of the advisors but was not completely adequate assuring a complete destruction of the threat and the remaining missiles rendered it unacceptable.
- Invade the island. Not acceptable for it would initiate a war.
- Blockade the island.

The last of the preceding courses of action was modified into the adopted American response, renaming the blockade a "quarantine". The Russian reaction, again in the same way as the Americans, had different options. They ranged from the employment of the diplomatic

instrument to the application of measures of force against other vital interests of the United States. Considering that this last alternative led to an unacceptable escalation, the Russian leader resorted to the diplomatic solution coupled with an intense propaganda focused on world opinion. The Russian cargo ships were forced to retreat. The compromise or final phase of the crisis has generally been considered an American success for Moscow was forced to withdraw its emplacements.

It is interesting to note though the point made by Sergei Krushchev, son of Nikita, during a lecture given at the Naval War College in March of 1998. According to him, the political objective pursued was the attainment of the condition of equality, a limited objective, which according to them they did achieve. In conjunction with this, the United States promised not to invade Cuba and later the American missiles from Turkey and Italy were removed, following the same line as the second Russian demand. Considering this argument, the verdict of who managed the crisis in a better way could be argued. If it were to be considered a phase leading to a possible nuclear holocaust, the obvious answer would be the United States for with their actions prevented escalation and eliminated the perceived threat. From a different angle, if the crisis were to be considered a political instrument, the Russians did indeed accomplish the stated objective, and also a little more. Before advancing to the second case for analysis certain comments in relation to the rules for crisis management by Gamba will be made. As for the first one, communication between the leaders was kept direct and almost permanent, proving that this requirement greatly contributes to the maintenance of control of the situation. The level of tension was kept at the lowest possible, ensuring that the response did not escalate the crisis, and at the same time giving the opponent an honorable exit. All measures and intentions were clearly

and openly communicated, incorporating international organizations as passive actors. This furthered the credibility of the threat and firmness of the adopted decision.

A different case for the application of the concept of crisis as a political instrument is found in the Falkland/Malvinas Conflict. It represents an opportunity for the analysis of a situation where one side's leadership managed very poorly. Additionally, this case has the benefit of portraying a situation without the nuclear background as a direct threat and being more recent.

For Argentina, the recovery of the Malvinas Islands had become part of their national interest. The military government of General Leopoldo Galtieri regarded this long-standing interest an achievable political objective. In January 1982, the Argentinean government began considering the use of force, in case negotiations with the United Kingdom (UK) did not fare well. The stalemate was finally reached at the beginning of March. The situation was worsened by the incidents in South Georgia involving the scrap-metal merchant Davidoff.¹⁶ This occurrence had a twofold effect; on one side it contributed in alerting the UK of an imminent use of force by Argentina, and on the other hand, it severely limited the amount of time that Argentina had at their disposal for the development of a crisis in pursuit of their political objective.

It is the topic of the political objective that stands out as a focal point in this analysis. For Argentina, as has been stated, it was the recovery of the islands; for the UK, keeping them under their sovereignty. For both contenders the political objective, although important, involved a limited effort for its attainment. The departure from this condition was the socio-political effect that the Argentinean challenge had on British national honor and prestige. This affront greatly increased the importance that they gave to their political objective.¹⁷ As for the assessment of the situation, Argentina considered itself to be in a favorable moment for a *fait accompli*¹⁸,

following a negotiation process for the attainment of their sovereignty backed by influential actors of the international community. At the same time, greatly contributing to this assessment, was the erroneous understanding of the Minister for Foreign Relations that the US, USSR, Cuba, and the members of the OAS would most probably support Argentina in her endeavor. Lastly, this course of action was further motivated by a need to deviate national attention from internal economic and political problems towards an external threat or opportunity.

As to the process of this crisis, the challenge was materialized by the Argentinean landing, reduction of the British garrison, and military occupation of the islands. This course of action very closely resembles one of the methods described by James Cable for gunboat diplomacy. That is, a "definitive use of a limited naval force, otherwise than an act of war, in order to secure advantage...".¹⁹ Given recent historical examples, some even involving the UK, this alternative could have been counted as one of the textbook examples of gunboat diplomacy, had it not been for the British response. This was characterized for being almost immediate and with great determination employing what Beaufre terms "total strategy", or all instruments of national power.

The diplomatic instrument was used at the compulsion level, obtaining the following achievements: the international condemnation of the Argentinean aggression, the UN Resolution 502 requiring immediate withdrawal of Argentinean forces, the support of the US, the economic sanctions and the suspension of all military materiel supply. All of these measures were clearly intended to take the strategic initiative away from Argentina and severely limit their freedom of action. Politically, the UK united their population around their political leadership, publicly promulgating the use of force if it proved necessary, thus inciting cohesion and national pride. In relation to the military instrument, its employment started with the method of persuasion with the

preparation of the Task Force. This method later changed into induction, with the deployment of nuclear submarines, the promulgation of the exclusion zone and the progression of the Task Force to the area of operations. Argentinean reaction to this British response proved to be completely ineffective, demonstrating that they were not prepared for a strong response. Furthermore, they did not accept an honorable exit, complying with the UN Resolution. On the contrary, their irresponsible motivation of national pride intended as a cohesion factor, proved to be one of the biggest obstacles for the acceptance of negotiation procedures by means of a third party, initially conducted by the US and later by Perú. Militarily they escalated the crisis by the reinforcement of the islands and by their declaration of an exclusion zone around the archipelago. As is known, Argentinean intransigence in respect to the withdrawal of forces left no alternative for the British than the use of force. Hostilities began with the taking of South Georgia on 25 April, for a compromise had not been reached.

As to lessons learned in crisis management, Argentina did use its military instrument at the lower end of the violence spectrum, for the initial operation was clean, without bloodshed or destruction of civilian infrastructure. They clearly intended to continue with later negotiations, and for this they tried to keep communication between the opponents open. It was the British irrevocable decision to avoid negotiations until the Argentinean forces were withdrawn that impeded any advancement in the process. Argentina in this scenario, should have been ready to accept something less than victory, for the political objective pursued was at this point clearly unattainable. Having accepted to withdraw their forces, they could have been able to negotiate from a position of advantage, for Great Britain could not have deferred an acceptable solution for both parts any longer. Argentina failed to obtain its intended objective by means of a crisis as a political instrument, as they became involved in a war that was not planned nor prepared for.

The aftermath of the Gulf war provides a third and last case for analysis, enabling the application of this political instrument to a more contemporary issue. Saddam Hussein lost the war , but after seven years the United States and Iraq are still engaged in a conflict of interests. As a result of the defeat, Baghdad agreed to destroy its weapons of mass destruction and to allow UN inspections to prevent development of chemical, biological and nuclear capabilities. In conjunction with this an economic embargo was imposed, sanctioned by the United Nations. Most of Hussein's political freedom of action has been curtailed, but that left available has enabled him to stage a crisis for the attainment of partial and limited political objectives. It is probably true that at this moment the epilogue of this crisis has still not been reached but at least some of the phases of the process are by now clearly identifiable.

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available is severely limited, but this small wedge is enough for the use of a crisis as a political instrument.

As a matter of fact, Iraq's challenge can be identified as the expulsion of the UN inspectors. This action was coupled with a diplomatic approach to Russia, who has begun a leverage in their favor. The American response-- an overwhelming display of force with the deployment of three carrier battle groups, air force bombers and strike aircraft, coupled with diplomatic approaches for the maintenance of the sanctions, so as to force Iraq to readmit the inspectors and comply with the sanctions imposed. Iraq's reaction, a reversal of the challenge, accepting the renewal of the inspection teams, although with a modified composition for they were also to include UN diplomats. The final compromise has yet not been reached, but international pressure for the ending of the inspections and the lifting of the economic sanctions are more common place. It could be said that from Iraq's perspective a partial objective has already been accomplished, for the time horizon for the ending of the sanctions and inspections has been brought forward and the response executed by the United States more than generating the desired action on the opponent, negatively influenced the regional and international environment eroding their prior unconditional support.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

Giving due consideration to US National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy it can be clearly extrapolated that it is not within the country's policies to include the generation of a crisis as a political instrument for the attainment of a political objective, independent of how limited it might be. Nevertheless, this fact does not preclude other states of making use of this instrument against the United States or against themselves, for today's globalization, increased stature of international organizations and unipolar environment has rendered the use of

conventional war politically increasingly costly. Moreover, the concepts engagement in the world and shaping of the international environment involve the use of all instruments of national power²⁰ and the military element constitutes but one of these instruments and not necessarily the supported one, but more generally, a supporter of the rest.

From a different approach, for those states where the use of a crisis for the attainment of political objectives becomes a viable alternative, the appropriate involvement of the military instrument acquires the utmost importance. Independent of the approach, a common consideration for the operational commander is that in these circumstances the division between the strategic and operational level become very tenuous²¹, for operational or even tactical events may have strategic and political repercussions. In this scenario, for the operational commander strategic and even political awareness becomes a must. On the other hand, what may appear as a broadening of the military horizon has also a very marked counter-effect, for direct control of the military instrument from the strategic level becomes a common occurrence, severely restricting the operational commander's freedom of action.

CONCLUSION

Today's unipolar environment, characterized by a growing globalization and integration of the world, has seen a rise in the stature of international organizations because of the increase in the capacity to enforce resolutions, primarily through the formation of coalitions. This situation has led to a reduction of the freedom of action enjoyed by states to use war as a political instrument for the pursuit of political objectives.

The little freedom of action left has proved to be sufficient for the employment of a different political instrument, the one known as crisis. In this case, the political objective is of a limited characteristic, and the process followed involves the establishment of a challenge, the

response of the challenged, the reaction by the challenger, and the compromise between the opponents. A successful crisis considers a compromise where at least a partial objective was met by the challenger and that the demands were acceptable to the challenged. On the contrary, an unsuccessful crisis will probably lead, as history has proven, to an unwanted conflict.

The management of a crisis as a political instrument involves a dynamic and creative use of the different instruments of national power, where the employment of the military tool generally involves a more cooperative form, and at the same time, finding its freedom of action significantly reduced.

For today's operational commander, given the requirements imposed by the situation of having to confront a crisis used as a political instrument or, on the other hand, being employed as part of one, political and strategic awareness become a must.

END-NOTES

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